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FM AMEMBASSY COLOMBO
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 7721
INFO RUEHKA/AMEMBASSY DHAKA PRIORITY 0744
RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD PRIORITY 7732
RUEHKT/AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU PRIORITY 5916
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON PRIORITY 4263
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI PRIORITY 1852
RUEHNY/AMEMBASSY OSLO PRIORITY 4267
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO PRIORITY 3363
RUEHCG/AMCONSUL CHENNAI PRIORITY 8343
RUEHBI/AMCONSUL MUMBAI PRIORITY 5829
RUEHON/AMCONSUL TORONTO PRIORITY 0541
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA PRIORITY 2625
RHHMUNA/HQ USPACOM HONOLULU HI PRIORITY
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RHEHAAA/NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS PRIORITY
RUEHLMC/MILLENNIUM CHALLENGE CORPORATION PRIORITY

UNCLAS COLOMBO 000184

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE
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DEPARTMENT FOR SCA/INS

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: SRI LANKA: FIGHTING CONTINUES IN MANNAR DISTRICT;
LTTE KILLS THREE SOLDIERS IN SOUTH

¶1. (U) On February 20 at 11:00 AM, three soldiers were shot and killed in Buttala, an area deep in Sri Lanka's south. The Defense Ministry blamed the attack on the LTTE and deployed additional troops to conduct a search operation. Following the attack, the Defense Ministry replaced the military commander in Hambantota district and gave the new commander control over police in the area.

¶2. (U) In northern Sri Lanka, there have been reports of heavy fighting and shelling this week in Mannar and Adampan, located 10 km inside LTTE-controlled territory. The Defense Ministry says government forces repelled an LTTE attempt to reclaim land lost near Parappakandal in Mannar and then launched a pre-dawn offensive toward Adampan. The military spokesman reports that 53 LTTE cadres and 2 Sri Lankan Army (SLA) soldiers were killed between Monday and Wednesday. The LTTE claims to have killed 10 SLA soldiers.

¶3. (SBU) COMMENT: The Hambantota Commander was likely replaced for his failure to eliminate the LTTE presence in the Yala area. The LTTE has conducted several attacks in this area over the past few weeks, including a claymore attack on February 4 that killed 4 soldiers. Casualty counts in this latest fighting in the north appear high, but are hard to verify.

BLAKE